

Community-University Engagement via a Boundary Object: The Case of Food Mapping in Columbus, Ohio

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Interest continues to increase in respect to developing viable public and highly collaborative scholarship. Yet often community and university partners face significant barriers relating to diverse motivations of individual partners and different desired outcomes. The aim of this manuscript is to contribute to the scholarship on community-university engagement by including the concept of a 'boundary object' as a vehicle to drive practice. The boundary object is a shared space, or resource, which may be tangible or abstract, and is co-created by the community and university. The object allows various partners to develop a consensus on the object itself while maintaining individual motivations, outputs, audiences and eventual outcomes. Using this concept to address common pitfalls of community-university engagement, we document the case of the Food Mapping Team, a partnership of faculty, research staff, students and community groups in Central Ohio. Through our analysis, we offer tenets to successful use of boundary objects and general recommendations for public scholarship.

Keywords: boundary object, community based research, community-university partnership, case study, food mapping

Introduction

The development of community-university partnerships is on the rise, in part due to more scholars engaging in community-based research (CBR), or research designed to be valuable for both the community and the scholar (Sage, 2014; Dick, 2010). However, community-university partnerships continue to face traditional barriers that have led to disengagement of universities within their communities. Barriers include the often cited problem of university leadership not supporting these relationships by providing the necessary resources (e.g., flexible funding) and incentives (e.g.,

elevating service during the tenure process) to enable full engagement and recognition for the work involved (Kecske & Foster, 2013). Another set of barriers that arise between community and university partners, which are the focus of this paper, result from the different internal motivations, desired outputs and eventual outcomes among partners (Stoecker, 2008). Recent approaches to community-university partnerships, such as CBR, attempt to address a recurring problem in community-university barriers, uni-directional relationships, by collective research agenda-setting with all partners and attention to inclusivity in the research process. An example of uni-directional relationships would be when researchers (and students) are perceived as going into a community and extracting information from the community for their own learning objectives, versus inviting the community partners to the university and making sure that projects provide community partners with the ability to address their objectives (Bruning, McGrew, & Cooper, 2006).

The co-creation of the research agenda by all partners (faculty, students and community partners) is also meant to utilize everyone's expertise and meet the needs of all participants (Bloomgarden, 2013; Holland and Gelmon, 1998). Not including community partners in agenda-setting can cause feelings of disempowerment, leading to a lack of engagement, which impacts the trust of the community partners in the relationship (Bloomgarden, 2013). Community partners more intimately know how their communities are defined and what specific challenges they face (Holland and Gelmon, 1998); yet including community partners in agenda-setting often reveals the disparate motivations, desired outputs and overall expectations among the partners (Stoecker, 2008; Sandy and Holland, 2006). Expectations are often unrealistic as there is a lack of recognition that activities need to be focused and thoroughly planned while accompanied by regular and open communication (Baum, 2000).

Our aim is to contribute to the growing research focusing on effective community-university partnerships by illustrating the utility of the concept of a "boundary object" when successfully designing reciprocal and mutually beneficial community-based research projects. Focusing on the co-creation of a boundary object allows partners to develop a consensus on the object itself while having individual research motivations, desired outputs and eventual outcomes, even including different audiences meant to benefit from the research. To this end, we document the case of a transdisciplinary, community-university Food Mapping Team in Columbus, Ohio. We begin by briefly describing the concept of a "boundary object" for successfully engaging multiple stakeholders in a community-university project, then using the concept of a boundary object as a vehicle to remove common barriers as they relate to an effective community-university partnership. Finally, we offer critical reflections and recommendations for successful community-university engagement.

Conceptual Framework: Boundary Objects

One way to constructively structure community-university engagements is around a "boundary object." The concept of a boundary object was introduced by Sara Leigh Star, a sociologist, and James Griesemer, a philosopher of science, in 1989. A boundary object is a resource, which may be tangible or abstract, and is

co-created by the community and university partners, such as a database or an archive built and maintained collaboratively. A boundary object inhabits several different yet potentially overlapping social realms, and therefore can have different meanings with shared boundaries. Because boundary objects cross traditional boundaries, innovation of ideas, practices or technologies are possible (Fox, 2011). The object facilitates the shared boundary-making and emerges as a result of cooperation; it is not imposed from outside (Star, 2010). The object passes through multiple worlds and is translated differently, thus adapting to local needs. Coherence must be maintained to the extent that the boundary object may continue to arise and cross into these multiple worlds.

Boundary objects are flexible enough to meet the needs of all partners involved, but not so fluid as to lose a common identity across all partners (Star, 2010). The object is constantly translated by researchers and practitioners in ways that are specific to their audiences and needs (Worrall, 2014). Boundary objects facilitate multiple interactions (Worrall, 2014). The objects can appear weakly structured in common use, but very structured in individual use (Star & Griesemer, 1989). It is the creation, management, and maintenance of these objects that becomes critical to keeping all partners productively engaged.

While often used by computer science and management, the boundary object concept has been used by scholars in such different fields as engineering, education and medicine (Fox, 2011). With over 1,600 citations (Web of Science), boundary objects have been used to analyze everything from improving management at a community dental clinic (O'Keefe et al. 2014) to marine protected areas as applied in the Convention on Biological Diversity (Gray, Gruby, & Campbell, 2014).

In their seminal work on boundary objects, Star and Griesemer (1989) provided an initial list of potential types of boundary objects, which included repositories, 'ideal types' adaptable to local conditions, common objects with the same boundaries but different contents, and standardized objects meant to create a common method of communication across dispersed groups. The first example of a repository boundary object presented by Star and Griesemer (1989), and the case covered in their article, was the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at the University of California, Berkeley. This boundary object brought together scientists, amateurs, patrons and administrators. Each of these groups had a different vision and set of goals as it relates to conserving nature, yet found that they could share common repositories of scientific objects such as mammal and bird specimens. Individuals could borrow from the repositories "for their own purposes without directly having to negotiate differences in purpose" (p. 410).

By focusing on the boundary object rather than the reasons to develop it or the ways in which it will be used, partners do not need to develop a consensus on individual research motivations, outputs, or even the audiences meant to benefit by the outputs. In short, consensus is not required for cooperation (Star & Griesemer, 1989). Figure 1 illustrates how a boundary object can be used by different groups possessing individual motivations, individual desired outputs and outcomes while allowing these outputs/outcomes to be dependent upon the activity and resultant object in the center. Because the boundary object actively crosses boundaries into shared spaces, the partners must create and maintain the boundary object in a collective gathering space.

Figure 1. Boundary Object Depicting Independent, Overlapping, and Shared Spaces

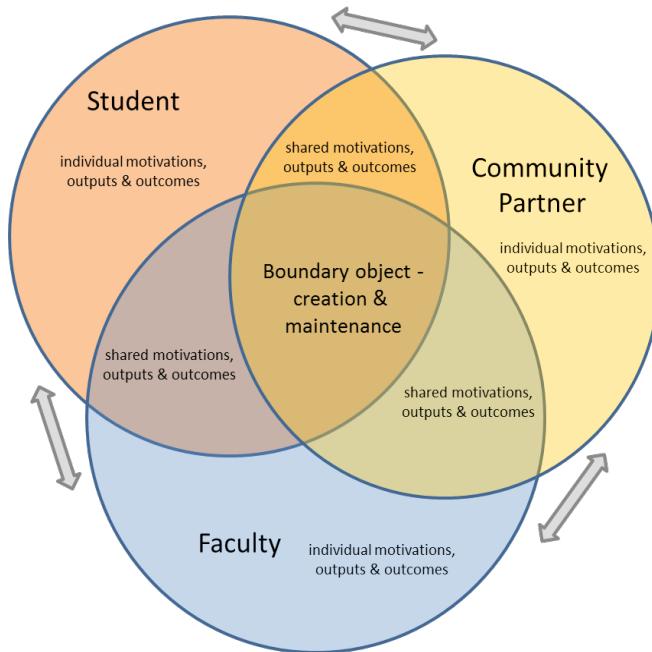


Figure 1 illustrates the shared space created by the boundary object between community partners, faculty and students in community-university engagement work.¹ The overlapping space shared by all groups supports the creation and maintenance of the boundary object. Partners may have other overlapping spaces that result from the boundary object but are not the boundary object themselves. For example, faculty and community partners may have mutual motivations and/or outputs from the relationship, yet each party has its own independent space as well. Each party has reasons for contributing to the boundary object, and each party has results they want from the boundary object. While the space is dynamic (represented by the arrows), meaning that partners may engage more or less over time with one another, the boundary object is what unifies the group.

It should be noted that despite wide use of boundary objects by scholars, this concept has been met with some criticism (Worrall, 2014). Fujimara (1992) argued that the weak, flexible structure would make continued coherence between participants difficult. This flexibility would cause problems because they would continually need to negotiate the boundaries (Lee, 2007). Maintenance of objects this flexible and weak would no doubt be problematic. Fox (2011) argues that when theorizing boundary objects, one needs to move from the descriptive to the analytical. What is lacking in theorizing boundary objects is a clear understanding about how these objects function and what makes them effective. In part, this understanding would help one not assume that every museum is a boundary object, or as in the case presented in this paper, that every mapping project is a boundary object (Fox, 2011).

Star (2010) addressed these criticisms by describing boundary objects not

just limited to her and Griesemer's typology. Many scholars focused on only one aspect of their boundary object concept, that of flexibility. While boundary objects have flexibility (and exist in a dynamic between totally standardized concepts and non-standardized, residual notions) they materially arise from action. Therefore, boundary object structure and form are not arbitrary; they arise from somewhere, and the scale of the object matches the organization of the participants creating the object.

Case Study Site, Community-University Team and Methods

Our case is set in Columbus, Ohio, a city of over 800,000 people and home to one of the largest university campuses in the country: Ohio State University (OSU), with student enrollment near 60,000. Like many communities in the nation, Columbus is also home to food insecurity, hunger, poverty, and residents with poor health. To address these issues, a transdisciplinary team emerged among OSU faculty, students, staff and community partners to explore how food mapping can be used to provide: a greater understanding of the multi-dimensional food system at the local, state, and regional level; evidence of geographic disparities associated with poverty, race, food insecurity and health (Hilbert et al., 2014); and opportunities to layer local primary and secondary data with multiple national data sets related to food access, availability, affordability, distribution and production.

The Food Mapping Team (FMT) included professors and researchers from Geography, Engineering, Public Affairs, Social Work, Horticulture and Crop Science, Cooperative Extension, City and Regional Planning, Medicine, the Agroecosystems Management Program, the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity and the Center for Urban and Regional Analysis. The faculty had a history of support and collaboration through OSU's Food Innovation Center (FIC), which supports interdisciplinary scholarship and collaboration throughout the University and community to address issues and problems of global dimension. Community partners joined the team as well, including Columbus Public Health, Franklinton Gardens, Learn4Life, Local Matters, Fresh Foods Here, Nationwide Children's Hospital and the Mid-Ohio Food-bank (MOF). The last two partners had already established a strategic collaboration with OSU in the FIC-supported Hunger.FOOD.Health Initiative's "Think Tank."

In 2013, the FIC awarded the FMT \$50,000 to support its interdisciplinary work, "Mapping the Food Environment to Inform Multi-Dimensional Intervention Strategies to Enhance Community Health and Well-Being." This grant-supported initiative created the necessary infrastructure to fully explore the relationships between the local food environment and food insecurity at the micro- and macro-level.

To document and analyze the work of the FMT and its use of a food mapping information system as a boundary object to forge and maintain a community-university partnership and address common barriers, we used two main methods. Foremost, all of the authors were members of the Food Mapping Team. It is through our participation and engagement with one another that we recounted and analyzed this case. We augmented our recollections with a document analysis, meant to further examine the use of the boundary object through the common barriers outlined in the introduction. Documents included 20 sets of meeting minutes (from 1/25/13 to 11/14/14), the initial

survey of expectations of team members, and a report developed by a third party reviewer. The third party reviewer observed a “check-in” meeting in March of 2014 where the team took time to step back and have a facilitated discussion regarding where the team’s work was heading. The facilitator posed questions such as: 1) Where do we see our food mapping work relative to other academic and non-academic activities?; 2) Are there ways to bridge the gap between the needs of community partners and faculty members?; 3) What are barriers for the broader community using our work?; and 4) What are our values and what do we value in our food mapping work? The third party reviewer compiled observational notes and qualitative data from this meeting as well as prior meeting minutes to create a report to guide the transition from the study design and data collection phase to the data analysis and results dissemination phase.

Case Study: Community-University Partnerships via a Boundary Object, a Food Mapping Information System

In this section we apply the concept of the boundary object to the experience of the Food Mapping Team (Figure 1). Threading together the concept of a boundary object with common barriers to successful community-university engagement, we ask:

- How does the boundary object meet the needs of multiple parties, including students?
- How do community partners co-create the object with university researchers and staff?
- How are all contributors recognized as having something to teach and something to learn?

In terms of the boundary object development process and its resulting structure, we ask:

- How is the object supported by the university?
- How is interaction planned and organized?
- How is consensus of “what to do” explored?
- How is two-way, open communication maintained?
- How are expectations managed over a long time period?

In this case study, the boundary object is an information system that consists of geo-referenced data and the means to display the data as maps. The information contained in these maps can be both intuitively appealing and understandable, as well as useful in making progress towards a wide variety of objectives. This boundary object provided a compelling focus to the FMT throughout its formation and subsequent activities. The focus of data collection has been: 1) Data available to the public from the U.S. Census, Department of Health, etc.; and 2) Surveys of residents and stores in the study area that were created by the entire team to meet multiple objectives and interests. Many members of the team and volunteers were involved with data collection. The data was stored within OSU computing facilities and was available as maps via a website at <http://foodmapping.osu.edu>, or by direct delivery to team members.

In the early days of the project, the team concentrated on developing and fortifying relationships. Individuals joined the team because of varying interests in, reasons for, and definitions of food mapping and their interest in using these maps, so the research agenda, study sites, data, and method of data collection were not pre-determined. Art of Hosting techniques were used to facilitate conversation and create a consensus on what to do and how to do it. Art of Hosting includes several methods meant to initiate meaningful conversations that empower groups to intentionally work together using conversations to move processes forward. The FMT used Open Space Technology, in which individuals pose questions/topics of interest to a group to help build an agenda. Individuals then participate in any of the group conversations about any of the topics/questions posed (<http://www.artofhosting.org/what-is-aoh/methods/>).

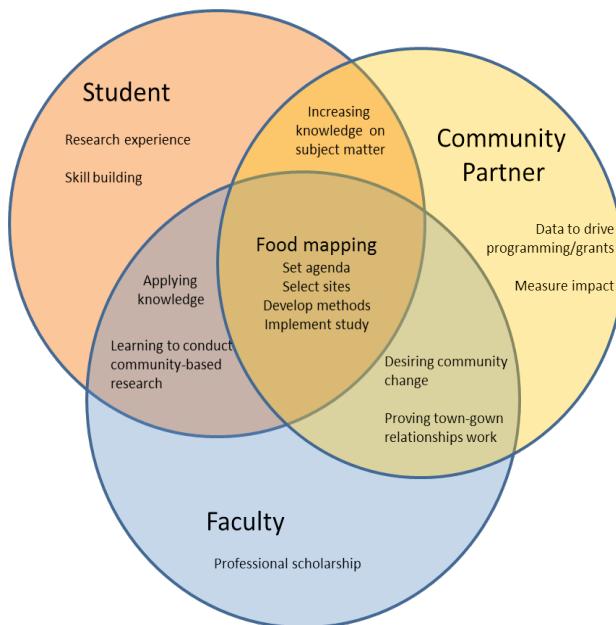
Over time, the university and community team collectively set the research agenda. They selected a study area and survey sites, developed data collection methods in the community, and implemented an initial study. The research agenda was not something community partners simply vetted or voted on; rather, they were fully engaged in the development. The team determined the initial study area based on several considerations that were discussed in team meetings and through email conversations centered on ensuring the project was feasible (in terms of time and money), was representative of the diverse population of a large metropolitan area, was sensitive to community partners who have been overburdened by research, and was reflective of the community agency partners' and university team members' needs for data to generate new knowledge and have appropriate baseline measures to inform policy and practice. Over the course of several months, team members met regularly to review examples of national, regional and local surveys related to a wide range of food-related issues of interest to the team. Facilitated discussions by one of the principle investigators helped members focus the survey on several key areas, including food access, food behavior patterns, neighborhood environment, health conditions, food security, and demographics. Though the survey content was reflective of the interests of team members, the approach for the initial study favored a need for quantitative data. Ongoing discussions by the team will guide future work for incorporating more methods that may be more time-consuming but provide different types of knowledge and supplement quantitative analysis and mapping (e.g., Photovoice, in-depth interviews, focus groups). The project coordinator worked with one of the principle investigators to identify survey sites in each of the targeted neighborhoods that would help provide the food mapping team with a representative sample. We relied heavily on team members' networks to identify and secure 15 survey sites, post and distribute flyers with online survey information and email survey links to clients and networks. There were 25 multidisciplinary college students recruited and trained to administer surveys.

While the team was setting the research agenda, statements by team members illustrated the varied motivations, audiences and desired outputs of each team member. For example, a team member from the city public health department wanted to collect "essential data to strategically [plan for] future initiatives." Another local agency member wanted better information to help achieve specific program objectives. One neighborhood nonprofit group member was interested in "the potential for

well-rounded mapping team to expedite the development of Columbus's urban food scene." One student desired the "opportunity to learn more about how food security and insecurity can be better understood and addressed through interdisciplinary means;" and another student needed help her with her dissertation. Undergraduate and graduate students were broadly interested in research experience, service-learning, and skill-building. One university researcher hoped to expand his personal and professional research agenda. Another faculty member aimed to create better models to anticipate health risks related to food access. The information system was created by the entire team in a way that would meet the varying professional interests and needs.

Examples of individual motivations and desired outputs/outcomes are illustrated in Figure 2 in the non-overlapping space. There remain many overlapping issues. For example, many faculty and community partners wrote about wanting positive community change and wanting to partner together in that change. Both students and community partners expressed interest in increasing knowledge of food mapping. Students and faculty were interested in applied research and mentoring/mentee opportunities. These examples are in the overlapping sections of Figure 2. Therefore, while the collective activity included planning for and executing the food mapping research agenda (center of Figure 2), this boundary object could also satisfy the varied needs and motivations of the entire team.

Figure 2. Examples of Boundary Object Findings



To make progress on creating the food mapping information system as a boundary object, team leadership (i.e., both community and university partners) created a deliberate meeting process that was flexible, but always planned and organized. Agendas and timelines were set at every gathering. Minutes followed every meeting.

An internet shared-file cloud location was created so that every team member had access to all relevant documents, diagrams, literature, preliminary data, and examples of scholarly methods and results. This regular and open communication via meetings, subgroups, e-communications and individual connections kept communication lines open and productive. Providing regular and open communication and collective access to materials helped manage expectations, particularly when there were institutional delays. The importance of this collaborative process, and the effort and leadership that it required from many individuals at many levels, cannot be overstated. For example, the review process by the Ohio State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) took longer than expected. Community partners initially did not understand the importance of the IRB process and some became impatient. Additionally, some non-university collaborators gained a new perspective about the responsibility the university takes to not exploit communities within which research is conducted.

In addition to regular communications, the team took a long session in March of 2014 to step back from the everyday work and reflect on bigger questions. During the meeting, it was clear that there was not a consensus on the definition or interpretation of “food mapping,” and no consensus on desired outcomes. As a direct result of this meeting, there was a greater push to not just recognize but to affirm the diversity of individuals, ideas, strategies and anticipated end products and applications associated with the shared work.

The March “check-in” occurred on university grounds, as did nearly all the team meetings. The data collection and some team meetings occurred within the community setting. This bi-directional arrangement of group members welcoming each other into their physical spaces was an important illustration of reciprocal relationships. For instance, community partners were instrumental in identifying places to conduct the survey and provided the social capital needed for students and faculty to gain access to these community sites. The university partners provided the trained volunteers for the data collection and the incentives for survey respondents.

Another aspect of the two-way relationship was that all partners taught and all partners learned. One demonstration of collective teaching was a team event held at the Mid-Ohio Foodbank titled “Food Mapping Team Dine and Learn Event.” Nearly everyone who attended delivered a presentation. Talks covered the latest projects, methods, and programs within the FIC, including the work of the FMT. An example of collective learning occurred when the team invited research practitioners from the Johns Hopkins Center for Livable Futures to visit OSU and meet with the food mapping team to talk about their work on the Maryland Food System Mapping Resource.²

Student engagement was part of the project design from the beginning. Students participated in all aspects of the project. Students were involved in the agenda-setting, site selection and survey design. Their volunteer hours provided much-needed assistance with data collection. The students also built relationships with community partners, learning about the roles of local government agencies and nonprofit organizations in community change. They learned responsible practices while working with the public in community settings. Students also learned an appreciation for the life experiences of survey respondents across the study sites.

All of the work conducted by the faculty-student-community food mapping team described here would likely not have been possible without the support and initial impetus from OSU. Funded staff support was instrumental to the success of the project. In addition, university support was used to provide incentives for survey respondents, which recognized the time invested in filling out the survey. Funds were also used for food at meetings, a practice increasingly uncommon on public university campuses. The experiences of eating together while discussing food mapping created a communal atmosphere. Finally, funding was used to send team members, both community partners and faculty members, to conferences to disseminate the work.

Discussion

The FMT collaboratively set the research agenda, designed an in-depth community survey tool, selected study sites, developed methods, implemented the project and collected data. The repository of survey data that was collected is maintained at OSU for mapping, data analysis, and other research, teaching, policy-making, and advocacy purposes. Any FMT member can use the data to examine questions at a range of scales, from a small neighborhood to the entire study area (comprising several urban neighborhoods in Columbus), without compromising the data for others. In this way, the conception, design, collection, analyses and maintenance of the repository of community-based and geographic data are the activities that created the FMT boundary “object.”

From this experience, the authors found three critically important tenets of successful engagement focused on a boundary object. The first tenet is that it is the co-creation, management and maintenance of boundary objects that is *critical* in keeping partners together. The collaborative work itself is the needed creative action step, rather than any particular agenda or outcome. Because the boundary object operates in a shared space that belongs to everyone and no one at the same time, hiring a part-time, unbiased assistant to manage the day-to-day needs of the project was crucial—it meant that someone was responsible for making sure that the common space and resources were collectively and continually maintained. The second tenet is that boundary objects facilitate interactions. The team project provided the opportunity for two-way communication among partners. It would have been nearly impossible for the researchers to gain access to all the survey sites without the help of community groups. Likewise, the funding and technology provided by the university would have been costly for a community group to obtain and interpret.

The third tenet is that the boundary object is weakly structured in common use, but very structured in individual use. The object is constantly translated by stakeholders as “local” needs arise. The co-created repository of survey data can be used by individuals or smaller groups for their own projects. Each member is able to take what they need from the repository. Data provided is information for grant seeking; research for a journal article; targeted programming; advocating for policy change; or maps that frame community conversations around food access, justice, sustainability, affordability, and sovereignty. What really brought the boundaries of our shared space to light was the March 2014 meeting when the team stepped back from the day-to-day project

needs and revisited larger questions that were initially asked during the first meeting about what food mapping is and why would one do food mapping. This was critical because group membership had changed somewhat from the first meeting. While it was unsettling that there was nothing near a consensus, it simultaneously highlighted the importance of the survey process as being central to our collaboration and the making of our boundary object.

The co-creation and continual maintenance of the FMT's boundary object has been more than just an effective approach to community-university engagement. Within a two-year period, our partnerships have secured extramural funding, disseminated results at national meetings, trained and mentored numerous undergraduate and graduate students in community-based research, contributed to outreach and engagement by actively engaging faculty and students in service-learning, developed and launched novel courses, and strengthened and created new, innovative research and project-based relationships. Likewise, community partners have been able to leverage relationships for grants and anticipate using the data for future grant applications. Furthermore, several community partners are interested in how the data and maps will help frame and drive decisions around community-based food intervention strategies, including those targeting individual behavioral-level change, the community food environment and various food policies. Community partners have benefitted by having student volunteers provide both direct service and indirect service through community-based research (e.g., assisting with focus groups related to urban agriculture, completing surveys for a healthy corner store initiative, and completing a literature review using extensive university library resources largely inaccessible to the general public). Community partners have their logos on signage, are included in press releases and can be included in the growing FIC network, which is meant to help community partners and university researchers connect to develop collaborative relationships.

Critical Reflections and Recommendations

First, striking the right degree of boundary object flexibility can be a challenge. Given too much flexibility, focus and commitment may waiver. Given too much structure, 'boundary surfing' may diminish. Participants can and should arrive at the object with different motives and desired outcomes, but the object should be thoughtfully shaped and protected from becoming too porous. To provide this disciplined flexibility, FMT hosts and staff aspired to provide a safe environment where community partners and academics could collectively build the food mapping information system, free of judgment and acknowledging the team's differences as an important and even unifying strength.

Second, creating and sharing a robust, sophisticated data and mapping repository across academia and community stakeholders while taking into consideration differences in resources, technical expertise, languages and aspirations, requires thoughtful planning. For example, much time and energy was invested to make shared data presentable, comprehensible, secure and accountable for all collaborators. To address this need, the FMT followed the progression of the boundary object and tried to anticipate issues of process, translation, context, shared meaning and participation. Ex-

ecuted carefully, the boundary object becomes an orchestrated and dynamic knowledge exchange. Without such intentional openness to differences, the object can become a grand stage for replicating power dynamics that, intentionally or not, discourage community partners from becoming co-creators.

Third, many universities are newly committed to supporting outreach and engagement as an integral part of promoting a positive culture permeating traditional university boundaries. “Change agents” are central to setting the tone in which culture change is viewed. Senior FMT members provided critical support and mentorship to probationary faculty throughout the process. This mentoring was invaluable as junior faculty learned to identify research questions that would contribute to the team as well as their own professional agenda. The return-on-investment is already being realized as collaborators have collected preliminary data to support larger extramural funding and have submitted several peer-reviewed manuscripts.

Lastly, in addition to and beyond the individual mentoring, the creation of a supportive network and infrastructure that affirms community-university engagement will serve as a roadmap for widespread institutional change. To help our colleagues invested in community-university partnerships succeed in building, promoting and sustaining institutional support for community-university engagement, the team recommends the following:

- Carefully selecting a boundary object that will focus the partnerships in ways that serve the many and varied needs of the partners;
- Providing internal university engagement impact grants aimed at creating sustainable programs for transformational change;
- Encouraging flexible funding models that support and encourage the necessary space, resources and time required for collective identification of community-university boundary objects;
- Highlighting outstanding examples (best practices) of successful faculty, staff, and community partnerships via social media and community-university marketing;
- Providing ‘fishbowl’ interactive workshops to engage with community partners and discover ways to build stronger collaborations;
- Financially supporting service-learning curriculum building that enables community-based research and learning for students;
- Considering the significant time and investment of community partners when budgeting for a project;
- Offering faculty and student travel awards to disseminate best-practices and programmatic outcomes;
- Hosting an annual outreach and engagement forum to highlight collaborations and serve as a networking opportunity across the university and community.

Conclusion

Successful community-university engagement requires thoughtful and mutually-invested strategies to ensure success. The use of a co-created boundary object as a vehicle to facilitate cohesive interdisciplinary-community partnerships proved

successful for the Food Mapping Team Initiative. This community-based research project illustrates the utility of a boundary object to respect individual motivations and encourage individual outputs and outcomes while maintaining a shared appreciation and focus on a common nucleus. Community-university partnerships can be enhanced by implementation of boundary objects.

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Notes

¹ We include students as a separate group recognizing the importance that students play as partners in successful community-university collaborations and the growing emphasis on service-learning (Campus Compact, n.d.).

² For more information on the Maryland resource, see <http://mdfoodsystemmap.org>

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Authors

Jill K. Clark, Ph.D. joined the John Glenn School of Public Affairs as an assistant professor of food policy in 2012. Her Ph.D. is in Geography and her Master's Degree is Land Resources. Dr. Clark's research centers on community and state governance of food systems, with particular attention to small and mid-size farm viability and food insecurity.

Michelle L. Kaiser, Ph.D., MSW, MPH joined the OSU College of Social Work in 2012. She is part of several collaborative interdisciplinary community-university partnerships through OSU's Food Innovation Center, including being a PI for the Food Mapping Team. Her research focuses on community food security strategies and the intersection of health, social justice, environmental sustainability, and economic development.

Richard Hicks, MPA joined the Columbus Public Health Department in 1992. During much of this time, he has worked with community organizations and stakeholders to develop and implement community-based health initiatives. These initiatives have been focused on addressing health issues relating to community nutrition and environmental sustainability.

Casey Hoy, Ph.D. joined The Ohio State University in 1987, and has provided leadership to the Agroecosystems Management Program since 2006. Hoy's past research has included systems analysis and its application to integrated pest management and applied ecology. His current work involves interdisciplinary leadership toward advancements in agroecosystem health and sustainable communities.

Christy Rogers, Ph.D. serves as the Director of Outreach with The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity. The Kirwan Institute is a University-affiliated applied research institute that advances equitable community development locally and nationally. Dr. Rogers holds a PhD in Geography from The Ohio State University and a professional degree in Landscape Architecture from the Harvard Design School. Christy also volunteers at the United Way of Central Ohio HOME Impact Council.

Colleen K. Spees, Ph.D., MEd, RDN, FAND serves as an Assistant Professor in Medical Dietetics & Health Sciences. Her primary focus of research involves targeting interventions aimed at providing optimal nutrition for chronic disease in disparate populations. In this capacity, Dr. Spees has initiated multiple studies in collaboration with food pantries and health centers serving our most vulnerable citizens. In addition, Dr. Spees is PI of OSU's Food Innovation Center's Hunger.FOOD.Health Initiative (<http://fic.osu.edu/initiatives/food-security/>).